

Iowa Outdoors

Iowa Department of Natural Resources

www.iowadnr.com

Editor: Mick Klemesrud, 515/281-8653
mick.klemesrud@dnr.state.ia.us

Feb. 17, 2004

1. Pheasant and Other Wildlife Survival – by Joe Wilkinson
2. Tree and Shrub Packets for Wildlife Habitat Available
3. Iowa DNR Non-Game Program Needs Your Help
4. Ice Fishing Report

PHEASANT AND OTHER WILDLIFE SURVIVAL

By Joe Wilkinson

Iowa Department of Natural Resources

That blanket of snow Iowa has been wearing for couple weeks now is starting to tell the tale. A flock of pheasants shows up vividly in a snow covered field; scratching for waste grain. Your backyard birdfeeders are more crowded. Telltale deer and rabbit tracks multiply in the yard, or along field edges. Wildlife species are beginning to feel the bite from extended snow cover and cold temperatures. Are they affected? Sure. Is it critical? No. Could it become a major concern? It depends on the next few weeks.

“While any significant snowfall events can be of concern, this winter was pretty good for pheasants and quail up until two weeks ago,” notes Todd Bogenschutz, upland game biologist for the Iowa Department of Natural Resources. Past radio telemetry research on hen pheasants in Iowa has shown that winter mortality increases about 3.5 percent for each week there is measurable snow on the ground. “They are not dying of starvation or exposure,” says Bogenschutz. “They are being eaten. Snow cover makes pheasants more visible. With colder temperatures, they are more active; feeding longer. That tips the scale in favor of the predators.”

Iowa’s pheasant survival...or lack of it...was major news three years ago, when record snow cover led to an estimated 70 percent drop in pheasant population, on the way to the lowest fall harvest on record. That winter, however, was one of the harshest ever in Iowa. Thus far, we’ve had only a couple tough *weeks*—not months.

Through the first week of February, Iowa received approximately 23 inches of snow, according to data from the National Climatic Data Center, explains Bogenschutz. In a normal winter, expect to see about 25 inches through March. Up to now, the state—

on average—has had 26 days with an inch or more of measurable snow on the ground. Over an entire season; a typical winter would have 50. So far, Bogenschutz says Iowa has seen a relatively good winter for upland game species. “Iowa could experience higher bird mortality if measurable snow conditions persist another four to six weeks; without moderation in the temperatures, or with additional snowfall.”

Most other wildlife critters face a similar midwinter outlook. The songbirds in your backyard might be crowding the feeders now. Those feeders can supplement their feeding regimen. That might be why a couple dozen mourning doves filled a tree above my seed feeders this week. “The deep snow affects some; juncos and other ground feeders,” points out DNR wildlife diversity biologist Bruce Ehresman. “Ice on the ground would have been a more critical factor. So would a couple more weeks of extreme cold. Overall, songbirds are in good shape,” assess Ehresman.

Small mammals; rabbits, chipmunks and mice operate *under* the snow; at ground level, feeding on stems, grasses and roots. Some, like squirrels, have nuts cached for retrieval when the snow gets deep.

Larger species—turkeys and deer—head into harsh weather in a little better shape. “Most turkeys had good fat reserves (ahead of this month’s cold and snow) heading into the winter,” notes Todd Gosselink, the DNR’s turkey biologist. “The weather’s been pretty decent up to the last couple weeks. If the heavy snow cover would last through February, then there could be an impact. (For turkeys), it really comes down to spring reproduction and weather during that period.”

Deer are ‘flocking’ together too; grouping together in cold weather to utilize standing foods; food plots and other protein sources. “They’ll be shifting to tree buds and tips. That might push them up into yards,” cautions DNR wildlife supervisor Don Pfeiffer. “They’re looking for different foods that aren’t covered by snow.”

Don’t Like the Weather? Geese Leave.

Waterfowl have an option that most other Iowa wildlife does not. They can migrate. And they are. “We have seen major movements of Canada geese in the last couple weeks; Vs of 150, 200 birds flying low, flying straight,” notes Guy Zenner, DNR waterfowl biologist. “They are getting out of Minnesota, where their food is covered.” Likewise, many Iowa geese have vacated the premises. “Some areas in northern Iowa are without geese for the first time in four years,” says Zenner. “They fly just as far as they have to, for food and open water. They’ll push (the snow line) pretty hard. They have a strong urge to get back to their breeding grounds.” At the same time, he points to local populations of ‘park geese’ who do find enough to eat, while spending the winter in urban settings.

To Feed or Not to Feed?

With game birds more visible now in the heavy snow, some people raise the question of feeding them. “The DNR does not recommend people feed (game) birds in most situations,” underscores DNR upland game biologist Todd Bogenschutz. “It concentrates the birds for predators. If you feel the need to feed the birds, there are

several guidelines you should follow.” He recommends you provide food adjacent to good winter cover; such as cattails, switchgrass, or conifers, and away from tall trees. You should also scatter food to keep the birds dispersed throughout the habitat, and continue feeding throughout the remainder of the winter.

“Perhaps the best advice is to contact your local DNR wildlife biologist or Pheasants Forever chapter and plant a food plot or other habitat for the birds for next year,” urges Bogenschutz “A little advanced planning this spring is the best defense the birds have against Mother Nature next winter.”

###

TREE AND SHRUB PACKETS FOR WILDLIFE HABITAT AVAILABLE

Whether you love watching birds, hunting, or just appreciate nature, it is important to understand that the habitat created by trees and shrubs is critical to wildlife survival in Iowa.

“Though one tree gives some benefits, a diverse planting of trees and shrubs give the greatest benefits to the most wildlife,” said John Walkowiak, chief of the Iowa Department of Natural Resources forestry bureau. To expand wildlife habitat, the State Forest Nursery at Ames is offering low cost packets of hardy trees and shrubs for citizens to plant.

The Songbird Packet consists of 20 tree and shrub bareroot seedlings and is ideal for someone who has a large area in their yard to devote to wildlife. The Songbird Packet sells for \$20 (includes shipping) and consists of 2 bur oaks, 2 white pine, 4 wild plum, 4 chokecherry, 4 gray dogwoods and 4 serviceberry plants. The bareroot seedlings are 8 to 24 inches tall. This Songbird Packet was developed in cooperation with Audubon Iowa.

For the small acreage owner (1 to 5 acres), three special Wildlife Packets of 200 trees and shrubs are available for \$90. The General Wildlife Packet contains 50 white spruce, 50 bur oak, 50 gray dogwood and 50 common lilac. A special Turkey Packet developed in cooperation with the Iowa Chapter of the National Wild Turkey Federation contains 50 bur oak, 50 red oak, 50 pin oak and 50 gray dogwood. A special Pheasant and Quail Packet developed in cooperation with Iowa Pheasants Forever contains 50 redcedar, 50 wild plum, 50 ninebark and 50 gray dogwood.

To order Songbird or any of the Wildlife Packets contact the State Forest Nursery at Ames at 1-800-865-2477 or go on line to www.iowatreeplanting.com. The packets will be delivered to a central point in your county in early to mid-April. You can have a real impact on wildlife habitat by planting trees and shrubs to provide more shelter, food and nesting sites.

###

IOWA DNR NON-GAME PROGRAM NEEDS YOUR HELP

BOONE – A recent U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service survey found that nearly half of all Iowans over the age of 16 participate in wildlife viewing activities. Despite the high interest and participation in this non-consumptive recreation, most Iowans do not realize that there is a state program that supports these species.

The wildlife diversity program in the Iowa Department of Natural Resources actively teaches people about landscaping for wildlife, advises management of private lands, bird feeding, where to view wildlife and co-hosts wildlife viewing events.

The program also conducts research on wildlife ranging from frogs and turtles to bats, bald eagles, grassland nesting birds, bobcats, wind farms and breeding birds and has been successful in restoring river otters, peregrine falcons, ospreys and trumpeter swans to the state.

The wildlife diversity program is funded through the Fish/Wildlife Trust Fund (more commonly called the Chickadee Check-off) on the Iowa state income tax forms. These donations help 80 percent of the state's wildlife species, and are used to directly educate more than 25,000 Iowans about natural resources.

As income tax season approaches, please consider donating to the Chickadee Check-off. The wildlife diversity program depends on these donations to help in the conservation of more than 400 non-game species that frequent the state.

For more information, contact Mark McInroy, Wildlife Diversity Technician, at 515-432-2823.

###

IOWA FISHING REPORT

For the week of February 17, 2004

www.iowadnr.com

Ice conditions continue to vary greatly across the state.

Northwest

Walleye season is now closed on Sprit Lake, East Okoboji and West Okoboji in Dickinson County.

Spirit Lake (Dickinson): CAUTION! The snow is deep and many people are getting stuck when trying to get on the lake. Anglers are catching yellow perch on the east side of the lake on both sides of Big Stoney Point, and on the northwest corner of the lake off Crandall's Beach using pilkees and jigs tipped with minnows and wigglers. Overall, the perch fishing has been fairly slow. Crappie fishing out from Angler's Bay Resort is still pretty good. Use smaller jigs tipped with wax worms or minnows. A few bluegills are being caught in the same area as the crappies on wax worms and small jigs.

West Okoboji (Dickinson): CAUTION: There is open water at the Gull Point area and at the north end. Anglers are still catching bluegills and crappies in 10 to 12 feet of water in Miller's Bay and close to shore in Smith's Bay. Another place to try for bluegills is Pocahontas Point. Yellow perch are being caught between Gull Point and Eagle Point at Spencer Beach in 10 to 12 feet of water.

Arrowhead Lake (Sac): Bluegill fishing is fair throughout the lake. Sorting is required to get the 7 to 8-inch fish.

Storm Lake (Buena Vista): Anglers are catching a few walleyes on the north shore by the college. Better fishing is in the late afternoon and early evening.

Little Clear Lake (Pocahontas): Fishing is fair for yellow perch using live minnows. Perch are measuring up to 12 inches.

Brushy Creek (Webster): Fishing is slow throughout the lake. Anglers are catching a few sunfish, crappies and walleyes. The main lake has only 3 to 4 inches of ice. There is a lot of snow on the ice.

Clear Lake (Cerro Gordo): Yellow bass fishing has slowed. Yellows are being caught around the Island and Billy's Reef at sunset. Use minnows and jigging spoons for the best action.

Rice Lake (Winnebago/Worth): Yellow perch are hitting minnows and small jigs. Many perch are small, so sorting is required. Anglers are catching a few northern pike in the 2 to 5-pound range while fishing for perch.

For more information on fishing in northwest Iowa, call the regional office in Spirit Lake at (712) 336-1840.

Southwest

There is a lot of snow and slush under the snow on almost all the district lakes. Overall fishing activities are slow. There are not a lot of anglers on most areas.

Big Creek (Polk): Bluegill fishing is fair to good during the day using tear-drops and wax worms in the Lost Lake area near the spillway. Crappie fishing has been good late in the day in the Lost Lake area and in the main lake in deeper water (up to 30 feet deep), using rocker jigs and minnows. Crappies have been from 8 to 14 inches.

Lake Ahquabi (Warren): Bluegill fishing is fair and crappie fishing is slow. The best fishing is early morning and late afternoon using teardrops and wax worms. A few channel catfish have been reported.

Hooper Lake (Warren): Bluegill and crappie fishing is fair to good in early morning and late afternoon. Try jigs and wax worms over brush and trees.

Don Williams (Boone): Crappie fishing has been good. A good area to try is along the eastern part of the lake in the afternoon. Bluegill fishing is fair to good with jigs and, most commonly, wax worms.

Hickory Grove (Story): Bluegill fishing has picked up and anglers are reporting some fair to good fishing.

Rock Creek Lake (Jasper): Crappie fishing is slow to fair using jigs and wax worms. Ice conditions are generally good throughout the lake.

Farm ponds: Fishing is best on farm ponds. Ice conditions are generally good. Best fishing is for bluegill with some crappie in the larger ponds.

Viking (Montgomery): Ice thickness varies from 6 to 9 inches. Anglers are catching bluegills and yellow bass, with better fishing toward evening.

Greenfield (Adair): Ice thickness varies from 5 to 7 inches. There are 3 areas of open water: at end of fishing jetty north of boat ramp, boat ramp, and around northeast shoreline. Use caution and check ice thickness and conditions often, avoid areas near open water. Anglers are catching 6 to 8 inch bluegills.

Mormon Trail (Adair): Ice thickness varies from 5 to 7 inches. Use caution and check ice thickness and conditions regularly. Anglers are catching 7 to 9 inch bluegills and sorting through smaller fish.

Willow Lake (Harrison): There is 8 inches of ice. Anglers are catching a few bluegills, with better fishing toward evening.

Farm Creek Lake (Montgomery): Ice thickness varies from 6 to 8 inches. Fishing is excellent for bluegills.

Anderson Area North Pond (Montgomery): There is 8 inches of ice. Fishing is good for bluegills in front of the dam.

Three Mile (Union): Ice thickness varies from 8 to 12 inches. Fishing is good for bluegill and crappies in the upper end and around creek channel trees in the middle portion of the lake. Walleye fishing is good on the rock piles on old roadbed.

Green Valley (Union): Ice thickness varies from 6 to 10 inches. Some bluegill and crappies are being caught.

Badger Creek (Madison): Fishing is good for bluegills.

Criss Cove (Madison) Some crappie and bluegill are being caught early and late.

Icaria (Adams): Anglers are catching channel catfish.

Fogle (Ringgold): Good ice and good fishing for lots of bluegills and crappies. Some channel catfish can be caught.

Slip Bluff (Decatur), Windmill (Taylor) and Wilson (Taylor) all have good fishing for bluegill and crappie. Ice thickness varies from 7 to 12 inches.

Walnut Creek Marsh (Ringgold): Fishing is good for bluegill and some crappies.

Little River (Decatur): Fishing is good for walleye in the mid lake creek channel, bluegills in the trees, and crappies in the mid and lower portions of the lake.

For more information on fishing in southwest Iowa, contact the regional office in Lewis at (712) 769-2587.

Southeast

Mississippi River Pools 16 – 19: Solid ice conditions continue on backwater areas of Pools 16 – 19 but fishing is slow. Anglers are reporting slow to fair fishing for bluegills and crappie. The boat ramp in Davenport is open and sauger fishing in the tail water of lock and dam 15 is fair to good.

Lake Odessa (Louisa): Bluegill fishing is slow. Anglers are still catching some nice fish in Sand Run. The deep snow is making it hard to walk to some of the back areas.

Lake Geode (Henry): Anglers are catching a few nice bluegills but the action is not fast and furious. Late afternoon seems to be the best time and up along the creek channel seems to be the best area.

Lake Belva Deer (Keokuk): The ice is still thin in a few spots. The area along the creek channel in the trees still seems to be producing most of the fish. If the weather warms later this week don't be surprised to see some open water.

Lake Rathbun (Appanoose): Crappie fishing has slowed a little from last week. Fishing has been the best on minnows or artificial jigging baits. An occasional walleye can also be caught using minnows or artificial baits. The best areas have been around Southfork and the high water ramp at Honey Creek State Park.

Lake Wapello (Davis): Bluegill fishing has been slow. A teardrop tipped with wax worms has been the best bait.

Lake Miami (Monroe): Bluegills have been hitting on teardrop jigs tipped with a wax worm. Evening has been the most productive time.

Lake Sugema (Van Buren): Bluegills have been hitting on small jigs tipped with a wax worm. An occasional crappie has been hitting on minnows. Anglers having the best luck have been moving and fishing around the flooded timber in the upper end of the lake.

Coralville Reservoir (Johnson): Fishing continues to be slow for crappies. Anglers have caught crappie throughout the reservoir around the rock walls and brush piles

Lake Macbride (Johnson): Anglers should be aware of poor ice conditions near the dam, in front of the north shore boat ramp, off Opie Ave., and the Causeway Bridge area on the south arm. Fishing has been slow to fair. Fish for crappies around brush piles in the early morning and just before and after dark. Some decent bluegills have been caught, although sorting required for sizeable fish.

Otter Creek Lake (Tama): Anglers have been catching a few bluegill and crappie around brush piles. Evening hours have been the best fishing times.

Pleasant Creek (Linn): Fishing continues to be fair for perch, bluegills and a few catfish, around the dam. Anglers have caught a few bluegill and crappie west of the old roadbed, although some sorting for sizeable fish.

Hannen Lake (Benton): Bluegill fishing has been fair on jigs tipped with wax worms. Some sorting is required for sizeable fish with best fishing in the morning and evening hours. Anglers are reminded that minnow usage is prohibited.

Diamond Lake (Poweshiek): Fishing continues to be fair for crappie and bluegill around brush piles using jigs tipped with wax worms. Anglers are reminded that minnow usage is prohibited.

For more information on fishing in southeast Iowa, call the regional office in Brighton at (319) 694-2430.

Northeast

Mississippi River Pools 9 to 15: Ice conditions are very good for fishing but angling has been somewhat slow. Generally the best catches have been early and late ice.

Low oxygen has been a concern in some of the snow covered backwaters. As these conditions set in, fish will generally retreat toward deeper water and lake openings. Remember, a 25 bag limit is now in place for most panfish species. Be sure to check the new regulations. In Pool 9, some crappies are being reported in **Minnesota Slough** and **Black Hawk Bottoms**. Mostly being caught the last hour of sunlight. In Pool 10, a few crappies and smaller bluegills are being caught in **Mud Hen Lake** and **Joyce Lake** near Harpers Ferry. Mid-day catches have been poor but in first and last daylight, anglers are finding a few fish. **Ambrough Slough** has seen some good catches of crappies. **Bussey Lake** is fair with crappies, bluegills and yellow perch all being reported but size has generally been small. In Pool 11, the main action is in the **Bertom Lakes** area on the Wisconsin side of the River. Catches of bluegills are at times good but the average size here too has generally been small. In Pools 12 to 15: Fishing reports were spotty this week. Anglers were catching bluegill and crappie in **Lainsville Slough**, below **Browns Lake**, Pool 13 as well as in **Michelsons** (mostly bluegill). The tubes were opened in Browns Lake early last week due to a sag in oxygen levels. This could cause weakening ice conditions due to slight current so use caution. Reports from **Pool 12** were slow fishing. **Rock Creek** in Pool 14 fishing is slow as well.

Casey (Tama) and South Prairie lakes (Black Hawk): Fishing is fair for bluegills.

East Lake (Black Hawk): Yellow bass are hitting wax worms and minnows on a jig or small spoon.

Lake Delhi (Delaware): A variety of fish are hitting wax worms or minnows fished in the late afternoon hours. Fishing is slow and you will need to move to find fish.

Volga Lake (Fayette): Excellent for 6-7 inch bluegill with occasional crappie or perch. Most people are fishing the deep water near the bottom. Morning and evening are best.

Lake Meyer (Winneshek): Anglers are catching bluegills around the south point near trees and stumps.

Trout Streams: Recent cold weather has left many trout streams frozen and unfishable. This can change quickly with a couple of warm afternoons.

For information on fishing in northeast Iowa, call the regional office in Manchester at (563) 927-3276.

###